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Hocking, William Ernest

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Prof. F. C. Porter
266 Bradley St.
with the regard of
W E Hocking

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WILLIAM ERNEST HOCKING.

Bancbrake Theological Seminary
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How Can Christianity Be The Final Religion?

William Ernest Hocking.

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THE simple facts of growth and the prospects of future growth in religion present no difficulty to the conception of a final religion. Neither do those other facts regarding the relativity of religion to the temperament and ideal of peoples and of persons exclude the idea of a final religion. The final religion is not that one which is reached when differences are eliminated and growth is finished; it is the religion which is reached when all further difference and all further growth may continue within the body of the same religion,—and must do so.

The difficulty of the problem lies in that word, "must." It is a fruitless apology for any religion to show that it is able to accommodate all possible religion within itself; unless it be also shown that all possible religion must identify itself with this one. It may be true that the Christian religion is universal, and yet false that the universal religion is Christian; and not unfrequently the arguments brought forward to establish the one refute the other of these propositions.

Such seems to be the case with most recent efforts to define the essence of Christianity. When the essence is found our first thought is: How admirable!—our second, Why must this be

called Christianity? Men repeatedly attempt to set up programs for Christianity which shall be permanent because they contain only the essentials,—the religious minimum. From such constructions, historical dogmas, and other identifying peculiarities of particular religion tend to disappear, and with them disappears unnoticed the possibility of recognizing any specific religion in the result. Particularly is this the case when the alleged essence is accommodated to the visible trends of current opinion in religion. The loud declarations of which our times are full that Christianity is essentially a religion of social righteousness, or of individual freedom, or whatever other kind of religion the declaimer thinks most commendable, have added nothing to the significance of Christianity. It has been too obvious that the cult is following and echoing,—not commanding; it has been straining to recommend itself to the graces of an age that has been advancing without it or in spite of it. It is less sure of itself than are the men to whom it speaks. It is learning more from them than they are from it. The very qualities which seem to its apologists to establish it are the things that are damning it; for the relation between leader and led cannot be concealed. The religion which has nothing to oppose to the natural mind of its age is quickly known to have no independent worth. The worst mistake religion can make is to listen too anxiously to the pulse of the time. Unless a religion is able to speak the words of an eternal future to the minds of incredulous and unwilling men, its claim upon their credence is lost. What men require in their religion is authority; and it is only upon authority that any valid claim to finality can be based.

If this is true, we may say that the claim to have authority, and to be final because of this authority, is one mark of sincerity in a religion. And in the course of history religion has uniformly been clearer about this aspect of its undertaking than it has been about its own contents. It has proclaimed with unhesitant vigor that it is absolute, and indispensable; but much less definitely what it is that is absolute and indispensable. It has thus made possible that curious spectacle so often repeated in the history of religion:—men venturing to revise the content which religion has declared final, and yet in all good faith holding to the identity of their religion. In fact, as we work out the logic of the

Protestant principle in the criticism of Christianity, this thing is done with increasing consciousness and boldness: we have little scruple, at present, in telling Christianity how much of what it asserts we are willing to believe, while yet we propose to call this self-selected remainder by the name of Christianity. The open door to casuistry which this process offers needs hardly to be pointed out. Whatever we otherwise find to be final,—that, if we are partisans, we seem to discover as the core of our religion; whatever we are forced to confess to be passing and untrue, that we excuse as adventitious. By something not unlike legal-fiction we contrive to retain for our religion the garb of the absolute while we cause it to give back to us our own changing thoughts. But this process is so inevitable that we seem committed to its logic; and its logic is, the destruction of authoritative, and therewith, of particular religion.

Among recent writers Professor Foster is remarkable not because he falls deeply into this line of sophism, but because he explicitly adopts it as a principle. He urges, in so many words, that "we simply take what we can use in our own spiritual households, and call that the essence of Christianity.... The fixation of the essence is the effect of our experience, not the cause."* Foster is governed in his thought by a deep sense of the necessity for autonomy in religion—the principle that men cannot ultimately acknowledge any rule nor any truth which they are unable to create from within—this means to him that religious authority must be reduced to a *minimum*. But why does he not more frankly say,—to *zero?* For any necessary historic attachment is a bond to the complete autonomy or freedom of the spirit. If Christianity came to set men free, in this way, it must end by setting them free from itself.

When we recognize this implication, should we not do the old religion more honor to discard it, than to retain its name and semblance in the position of a trailer in the wake of our henceforth independent spiritual progress, however much it has contributed to make us what we are? For it is the nature of every actual and living object to impose some kind of limit or constraint upon the mind, the free mind, of the person to whom it

**The Finality of the Christian Religion*, p. 515.

appears. The reality of any object, physical or other, is only recognized by its persistent opposition to the natural development of our subjective selves. If the demand for autonomy in religion has no limit, the consequence is that particular religion must vanish. I have thus come to believe that the fate of Christianity hangs in the last resort upon our *understanding of autonomy;* upon some possible revision of the demand which Protestant logic leads us to make. Attempts to save Christianity which are based on the ground that it agrees exactly with what we must necessarily otherwise come to think, do prove indeed that it is the religion of freedom; but also that it has become superfluous.

I.

It will be observed that this objection applies to all arguments for finality which are based on evidence that the religion teaches the Truth,—that it proclaims a finally valid ethics or metaphysics. For truth of this sort is that to which men everywhere are necessarily brought by the dialectic of their own experience and reflection; it is naturally independent of any special channel of discovery or propagation, whether personal or institutional.

In discussing the finality of a religion we are indeed inclined to dwell upon the question of its truth, and for two reasons. First, religion has in times past been chiefly attacked on this ground, and hence on this ground chiefly defended. The discussion of truth will thus always have a certain negative force: namely, that a religion which teaches falsehood can certainly not be final. In the second place, supposing that the final religion would naturally aspire to be universal, we seize upon that aspect of religion which could most plausibly demand general recognition,—namely, the true metaphysics, and the valid ethics that are fostered by it. The universality of truth seems the best and most natural security for the universality of religion. The weird anachronism of coupling the spread of philosophic truth in the present day with the religious machinery of propagation, does not at once strike us. But the essential trouble is that the universal religion, when defined on the basis of truth, is not identifiable with any particular religion, and hence not with Christianity

except by that courtesy which we by our birth are inclined to concede. The history of missions among peoples that have independent philosophic impulse furnishes abundant illustration of the elusiveness of this kind of truth when treated as property. Intelligent Hindus and Moslems easily accept our enlightenment without accepting our religion ; for they find, very rightly, that whatever is true, in this sense, belongs to them by birthright within their own religion.

But why do men desire to retain the name Christianity for the religion which is taking shape in the world at present—a name which from its history has definite polemic associations? Why not accept and hasten the apparent fact, that a new religion, independent of prophets and founders, is distilling gradually from the religious consciousness of all the peoples, truly universal in scope because universal in its origin, a religion for which all particular religions have prepared the way? The answer to this question may throw light on the real motive for that sophism, or let us say that religious-fiction, whereby the new—whether in the courts of Islam, or in the apologies for Christianity—is held to be identical with a permanent and sacred antiquity.

The truth is that men do not want a new religion. The very notion of a new religion seems to contain something subtly repugnant to the religious sense. This repugnance is founded I believe on the fact that one of the functions of religion is to join the minds of worshippers in the present time with the minds of worshippers in all past and in all future time. Worship is imperfect unless when I worship I am joining the race in worship. The universality of religion must extend through time as well as through the coexistent world. Having seen this, progress by discontinuity is henceforth impossible.

Thus, the function of religion as providing a particular type of worship, and other deeper necessities of which we must come to speak, require of us that our religion must be a particular religion as well as a universal one. This is the real source of the casuistry of apologetic ;—for religion, like every other live thing, is growing under the pressure of antagonistic requirements : it must be universal, autonomous, and actual, and yet at the same time particular, authoritative, continuous, historical. We are always torn between these requirements, but especially at present

the expansion of the universal element in religion promises to detach us from everything that is particular, so that we cling to the particular we have with a certain blind and dramatic insistence, like children who shut themselves in play-prisons and declare that they cannot get out. We have a conviction that the time for founding new particular religions is past. The modern mind has several times tried the issue, and has shown itself too sophisticated and self-conscious to undertake such an enterprise with both competence and sincerity at once. We must seize the best form that history has provided for us.

Such I think is in large part the psychology of the situation; as if this is the best we can do, let us say so. The particular element in religion, on this showing, does not interfere with the universal. Nor is it united therewith. There is nothing necessary about it,—and no reason could be alleged why each people should not worship God in its own way. Christianity would be the final religion *for us*,—and for us only.

Many are willing to accept this conclusion. Most liberal Churchmen practically adopt it, especially in their attitude toward foreign missions : the spread of Christianity as such seems to them a matter of no such break-neck imperativeness as it was once supposed to be. And as missions themselves become liberalized, they tend to conceive their task as one of education rather than of proselyting ; they are increasingly willing to graft our standards of morality and culture upon any stock of religion which their audience may have. They do indeed believe that this morality and culture depends upon a stage of religious insight which might well be called the Christian stage ; this stage is the highest,—and they endeavor to communicate it : but they do not believe that God is either interested in names or exclusive about mediators. If only they succeed in transplanting the *thing*, it is a matter of minor importance whether the learner adopt any conscious relation to the founder of their religion.

But to a vigorous minority—still able to give life to orthodoxy—it is an article of faith that in some way or other the particular element in religion is also necessary and obligatory. For these persons, the significance of Christianity does not lie simply in the fact that it is historic ; for they expect it to succeed religions which to many peoples can alone contain the worships

of their ancestors. To these Christians the union of the particular with the necessary in religion is of a more vital character, perhaps even of a metaphysical character.

Professor Foster rightly feels the force of these convictions and responds to them: he suggests that particular religion may be necessary because it presents to us a particular human person as a necessary religious object; and that this necessary person is Jesus. But how can a person be necessary to a religion? Not, if we are right, as an announcer of truth; but how else? Foster answers: Jesus presents the type of the perfect man. Far from perfect he may have been in his knowledge, in many of his acts, perhaps even in his teaching: but in his *disposition*, his disposition toward God and man, he is perfect. This disposition, after all, is the essence of Christianity, and being final it marks the final religion. If we could express the disposition of Jesus in the form of a set of ethical and religious principles, it would still be quite possible to adopt the principles and dispense with the man. But this, thinks Foster, is the peculiarity of the case: that the disposition in question can never be expressed in formulæ. It cannot be adequately described as the disposition to love God and your neighbor, nor as the disposition which does any specific type of thing: it can only be indicated or identified as "the disposition of Jesus." The permanent and necessary place of the man of Nazareth in religion is thus secured.

I cannot but honor the respect which is here shown for the deep sense of universal necessity with which orthodox Christianity regards its founder; but I must also confess that this mode of defending that feeling, ingenious as it is, seems to me fatal to the claim it would support.

For, in the first place, if the necessity of Christianity is indeed universal, it must also be articulate; it must be a communicable and defensible necessity; one which has fighting-organs —which can make its distinctive meaning clear in presence of other historical trends of personal influence like that of Gautama Buddha which profess and exhibit the same sort of authority. This requirement is so simple and obvious that Foster, unconsciously abandoning his own argument, proceeds to formulate the disposition of Jesus in four or five definite propositions, which are to be defended like other detachable truths,—and which can

therefore no more lend authority and finality to a particular religion than can other true doctrines.

These formulæ, be it also said, naturally exhibit to the extreme that fault in the tendency to absolute autonomy which we have mentioned. For the process of discovering the central disposition of Jesus,—that is,—of appealing from the words, the deeds, and even the thoughts of the person in question to an invisible and unrecorded motive is a perfectly ungovernable process. It can have in the nature of the case no objective checks. From the darkness of that recess of inner consciousness any truth may be expected to emerge which the advocate chooses to see. And this same procedure applied with equal generosity to the spirit of any good man should yield equally satisfactory results. As the freest of sophistries, it is also the most helpless. It seems to me, indeed, the first principle of sound criticism at this point: that if religion is to have any permanent attachment to the person of Jesus, it must find that attachment in his self-conscious intention and accomplishment; not in that which he felt but could not express.

In the second place, I feel bound to add that the attempt to enter thus intimately into the personal motive of Jesus seems unholy as well as fallacious. In the nature of the case, it involves an effort to go behind what is offered, to take from the heart of Him, the alleged perfect one, what he was unable or unready to give. The liberty which autonomy thus assumes is akin to that pressing subjectivity, on the emotional side, which has been the disease of Christianity, and is not yet overcome. Let us not dwell on this matter, except to note the paradoxical issue of this too-great freedom: namely, that to bind religious life to the immediate disposition of any person is perhaps the one kind of authoritativeness which in religion would most savor of tyranny—because it demands obedience to the inarticulate. It is the work of the prophet to turn his private disposition into an institution. Accordingly, it is the signal mark of the *true* prophet that he is able to deposit in objective, explicit, and enduring form that which first existed in him as a merely subjective conviction. Thus, to set up the disposition of Jesus, in contrast with what he was able in any form to utter, as a necessary object of religion, is indeed to establish the worship of failure.

I conclude, therefore, that a religion is not final because of the fact that it has announced the final truth, nor because it presents us with a perfect person. But there is yet a third way whereby that which is universal may conceivably be bound to a particular; and in a much more intimate and essential union than in either of these. An individual person may attain universal significance in case he assumes an *office* which has been created by universal necessity or consent. The man is made what he is by the mantle of his office; he is in large measure elevated and rendered superior to his intrinsic self. An office does not demand, and cannot define, the individual nature or disposition of the person who fills it. If the office is an exalted one, it in a large measure impersonalizes the incumbent, until in official presence of a man who represents a great interest or a great people we find ourselves less in presence of a private character than in presence of a law, a policy, or a force of nature. A function of this sort is logically a universal, though not a universal truth,—but a *universal*, independent of the particular person; and yet there are functions, and offices which must be performed by one person, and can be performed by only one person.

The logic of this relation between universal and particular may be illustrated by many a homely pass in the course of a day's work. Our dealings with each other are all more or less of an official character. We need not know so much as the individual name of our postman, our banker, our president; and we cannot deduce from the definition of a British Ambassador what individual must be identified with this office at any time; and yet it is exceedingly important to us that these general ideas—postman, banker, ambassador, be embodied at any time in one unique human being.

The fact that such functions are in large measure independent of the special disposition or quality of the incumbent is also familiar, and may be traced even to the more personal relations of life, which always retain something of an official character, and when they lose that character tend to fall into a certain insignificance and even vulgarity. The position of a guest in ancient times was a semi-official one. The guest at the Arab tent is not the man invited, that is, selected for his quality; he is the man who happens to come. And he is honored not for

his faculties and accomplishments, but only because of the fact that he fulfills for the time being the function of guest. He is guest by status. And in all of the finest hospitality of the present their remains something of that sense of status, which is able to treat even a stupid person with unspoiled courtesy and welcome, because he is received into this sacred position of guest.

It is to be noticed that when once that function is filled by an individual, no matter how accidental his relation to us may otherwise have been, we are henceforth bound by the particular as well as by the universal. The person and the office are no longer separable in reality although they may be separable in thought. The function has become, as we may say, incarnated in the individual.

Now, if there were any function of a distinctively religious nature, which is at the same time a necessary function, and a function which—in the nature of the case—can be performed by only one individual ; in that case, we should be obliged to acknowledge that the final religion is the particular religion in which this office is, once for all, fulfilled. And only in such case can we acknowledge any particular religion as final.

It is certainly not a distinctively religious office to teach the truth—not even the truth about God. The scientist and the phllosopher may have their hand in this : but Plato and Aristotle had no thought of founding a religion.

Nor is it a distinctive function of religion to furnish the world with a model of character ; for such models we turn most instinctively to various members of our own milieu. It is here, perhaps, that the persistent effort to turn the eye back to a receding historical figure becomes most unnatural and painful.

Indeed it is at least doubtful whether there be any distinctively religious office such as must be filled by a unique human person. To many sincere minds the religious need is fully met in the intellectual and moral vision of the eternal God.

It is not for me, as yet, to say that any such religious function, distinct from all other human functions, and universal in its scope can be defined. And I am still further from saying that I am able to define it. So far, I am only concerned to determine the way in which any particular religion, which makes claim to finality, *must present its argument.* You will, perhaps,

allow me to state somewhat more explicitly the logical elements of that argument:

First: it must be shown that there is such a necessary religious function to be fulfilled by a human being, and *what* this function is. The evidence for this would lie in the natural development of the religious consciousness, proclaiming its own wants as it deepens. Any genuine religious need of this magnitude, would in all likelihood make itself widely visible in human history, in the form of a religious problem with many crude and bungling answers, a problem so conspicuous that its solution could be consciously undertaken, and must be undertaken, by him who would inaugurate a new religious era. Such historical evidence would indeed be valuable, but could not, of course, establish the permanence of such a religious need,—which must be shown to arise eternally out of the nature of the religious spirit in all ages.

Secondly it must be shown that the given person consciously assumed to solve the problem by taking upon himself the defined office. The evidence for this, again, would come largely from the visible facts of history, not so much from the records of his *own* words and acts, as from the more inescapable and enduring fact of his accomplishment: the relation between accomplishment and intention cannot remain obscure.

To complete the argument it would now be necessary to show that the person not only assumed the office and actually met the requirements of it for his time, but that he is to be accepted by all men as the performer of this special function. This step, however, is utterly incapable of proof. For, as we have seen, it is never possible to demonstrate that a given office must be fulfilled by a given individual, because it is never possible to deduce from the nature of an office the complete description of the man who shall hold it. Whether one assents to the argument must therefore always be left to the possibility of individual recognition. That is, it must always be a problem for each person, whether he is able to recognize in the historical character proposed by the religion in question the one who for him fulfills that office. What defines the religion is its postulate that this being is to be identified with that function; and this belief it can only announce in the form of a dogma,—that is to

say, an assertion about ultimate reality which cannot be proved but which ought to be believed. In such dogma there is clearly no intellectual brow-beating, nor any restriction upon the genuine autonomy of the spirit: for this autonomy can go no further than the liberty to define its own needs and to seek their satisfaction.

If we are right, thus far, every religion will have just one historical dogma; and that dogma (which we may call the dogma of recognition), will be the defining character of the religion. It is in this dogma that its permanent authoritativeness will lie.

II.

With these principles, it will be evident that I cannot offer nor accept any proof of the finality of the Christian religion. But I may attempt to sketch the course of thought in which, as it seems to me, lies the best hope of a clear decision upon this issue.

We have first to enquire whether there is any necessary religious function which a unique human figure must fulfil.[1] Speaking most broadly and vaguely, the function of religion in our human life has been this: it has sustained confidence in ideas; it has kept alive the tension between the world that is, and the world which we are only able to imagine. We might conceivably come to accept the world as a fact, and to suppress as idle and meaningless all queries addressed to the cosmos requiring reasons for its peculiarities and inconveniences. But we never do turn all our reaction against the world as we find it into plain scientific effort for the future; we never learn to take existence as a datum to be made the best of. Our reaction splits, as it were: in part we are spurred to work, and in part we are stung to speculation. It remains a source of recurring surprise to us that we are set into such a scene as this; we are not sure that we ought not to resent it; and religion is perpetually reborn from this spring of dissatisfaction. It declares the question legitimate;

[1] To put it otherwise, we have to find whether there is any human need of a religious sort, which is (1) a universal need—not because it is universally felt, but because the development of the religious consciouness necessarily makes it felt,—and (2) a need which can be filled by some one official human deed, and thus only.

it offers an answer ; it enables us in some sort or other to believe in our dreams.

Dreaming, imagining, speculating, activities born of our conceit, are the most dangerous, the most subjective, the most presumptuous, the most indispensable, productive, creative of our powers ;—and these religion sustains at their origin. In this respect it sets man free ; not indeed by guaranteeing his air-castles,—as if religion were identical with the poetry it fosters ;—but by attaching his imaginations to some basis which is not itself imaginary; by conferring, in some way, a genuine, even an ontological validity upon that part of himself wherefrom his idea is born.[2] Clearly, the way in which this function is performed will depend upon the type of enemy which the speculative tendency has to meet. The office of religion will develop and specialize precisely as man consciously meets those permanent aspects of his experience which tend to defeat his belief in his idea, and reduce him to the world of positive fact alone.

At first, man's doubt of himself may sink no deeper than a question which his God immediately answers. He may hurl his doubt at the heavens in the form of a postulate of his own worth, —to see whether it will be denied. For this presupposition of desert is perfectly spontaneous, sufficient of itself to urge on that inner work of building and exploring which discovers the gods, and in a once-born people like the Greeks calls for no further confirmation. What man is, is a positive thing ; he might have been nothing, and lo, he is something ; for this something let God give him credit, even as he credits himself. With this simple assurance it is possible to believe at once in the deferred goal, and to deposit in heroic art the images of anticipated attainment.

Life cannot become at all intense or eager, however, without bringing a *comparative* consciousness to supervene upon this pos-

[2] To define religion by its function, that is, pragmatically, is to define it by its effects ; but that is quite different from identifying it with its effects. We can only approach religion as we approach any other reality, through things which are external to the thing itself, as are the services it renders to persons and society. To indentify the reality with its services, however, is to lose the reality and thus, eventually, the services.

itive touch of self-estimation. Standards of achievement are set; ambition tells each new-comer that whatever is done in the world, it is his spirit, spirit akin to himself, that is doing it. The infinitely bitter sense of impotence and exclusion in the presence of failure is in large measure a self-condemnation. And in proportion as man wins mastery over nature, in just that proportion does the possible despair of the spirit, as well as the suffering of the body, augment. The small voice of positive self-estimation is never wholly stilled; but its very presence does much to turn physical suffering into spiritual distress. Defeat is an impenetrable tangle of justice and injustice. One is dimly aware of the rights of the submerged subject without being able to take refuge in subjectivity, for there is nothing abroad to encourage the suggestion that the subject *per se* is of any value. It is first in the Roman world, says Hegel, that a human soul could be thoroughly lost. Nor even in success can the sense of the fortuitous be wholly banished so long as some must fail; a purely spiritual misery in the form of fear or self-suspicion infects the heart of happiness. There is no outcome but either to blame the gods or to deny them. In either case the life of dreaming is at an end; the world one faces is a world of facts.

The natural relief from this first stage of pessimism has been found, strangely enough in a second, and deeper stage. Let that former self-suspicion be confirmed from within by a discovery of guilt,—let me be robbed of my sense of desert,—and I can begin as a fact, by whatever logic, to look with less hostility upon failure. Now true as it is that man is by nature good, it is not less true that he is by nature evil. In reckoning human worth how can we say which aspect of an action ought to count:—its addition to the possible zero of existence, or its deflection from the perfect? The perfect act is simply the normal act; if we do right what thank have we,—that is to be expected of us, nothing less. There is no assignable *reason* why an act should not be perfect. But there is an assignable cause for its imperfection, namely an imperfection of character. And if there is an imperfection of character, no single act can be perfect. This is the rigorous logic of the Orient; and in the presence of this vast and fatal alienation from God, carried deeper with every addition to knowledge, with every further entrance into the works of empirical

existence, the physical miseries of life are without independent significance.

The sense of sin is the most active agent for the deepening of subjectivity. The postulate of positive human worth is a fixed quantity : it is not able in itself to lend any deepening to self-consciousness because it refers to things as they eternally are. But the postulate of the Orient leads to a continually deeper searching of the heart, under the painful and anxious awareness that if any act of mine fail of perfection it is my fault,—that is, it is due to the fault in my nature. It is certainly a one-sided postulate ; but without it the inner existence of men is shallow, and pessimism with regard to external nature and to society is irremediable; whereas the pessimism which normally accompanies this Oriental philosophy of our finite condition is but a question on its way to answer. By its sheer unfinishedness it keeps alive the searching speculative activity. One feels therefore a certain impatience with writers who wish to preserve the spirit of poetry in the world, and at the same time to cancel the sense of sin. It may be true that this sense is "an attitude becoming increasingly unreal to most serious men" ;[1] but if so it marks a weakening in our sense of the perfect. There are certainly right and wrong ways of dwelling upon sin ; and much weakening to be derived from the conviction of weakness. But the question before us is not a question of policy ; it is a question of necessity. No positive establishment of the human spirit was or is possible until it has felt the logic of this situation, and has put to destiny this question of sin in all its pungency as well as the question of evil fortune.

In truth, the realization of this logic of defect may become more intense as the positive worth of a character increases. The sense of alienation from the perfect normally grows strong with the heightening of standards. Religion always speaks of men's goodness in language more gloomy and more compassionate than they would willingly apply to themselves in their work-a-day comparative and civic consciousness. If persons comfortably situated and content are ready, in presence of the religiously heightened ideal of blessedness, to accept the corresponding

1 G. Lowes Dickinson. Hibbert Journal, 1908.

religious assertion that they are sad and in need of comfort, it is not incongruous that they should also sincerely acknowledge themselves miserable sinners, and yet know themselves to be respectable citizens.

For religion cannot minister directly to the self which good chance has made, nor to any relatively accidental layer of personality. It requires of every man that he make himself wholly human, that he uncover in himself the potential knave, that he measure his righteousness against the strains, not of his own special circumstances, but of those of the race. No man can attain subjective freedom, nor reach maturity of self-consciousness, without having thus taken upon himself in his solitary person the sins of humanity,—because they are in very truth his own. Our social self and the comparative consciousness that goes with it tend to deaden our sensibility to our moral evil ; for the diffused self-satisfaction in which we by custom float must first be banished before we can discover the valid conditions of self-judgment. We reach the requisite clearness only at moments which our present mode of life makes rare. But whether clearly recognized or not, the problem exists and rankles in every mature human consciousness. And he has seen most truly to whom his sin has taken on an aspect more sinister, perhaps, than that of voluntary guilt—an aspect almost of physical evil, inherent in the condition of a limited spirit, propagated from member to member of the species ; until something like the old question of justice rises within him, and he is capable of resentment because he is not God.

We have followed the dialectic of evil to its end, the free self-alienation from God, wherein we are again thrown back upon facts, but this time with a strong dash of the absolute *Wille zur Macht*. We make a pragmatic declaration that God is dead, and claim his place for ourselves. This may be regarded as the limit of sin, but it is also the symptom of a great health of spirit, and I dare say the only ground upon which Christianity can build a permanent structure. For, if I am right, universal religion can meet every element in the situation except this last.

The situation itself is not more complex than self-consciousness : one's view of himself is combined with his view of his

fortunes, and it is the task of religion to make this whole prospect an acceptable one, setting the subject free through its commerce with God. But what is needed is something of a decidedly paradoxical character. If men are to live freely in a world of uncertain fortune it is necessary that their affections be in a measure detached from the world of objects, and from the necessity of success in that world, and yet they must continue to act there and with absolute power. They must be detached without loosening attachment: it will not suffice that they are assured of being really identical with Brahm, if they must realize this identity by retreat from affairs. And again, if the difficulties due to imperfection are to be abolished, through any of those quasi-diplomatic processes known to the religions of the world as purification, forgiveness, atonement, etc., this regained status before God must be accomplished in such a way as neither to renew the resentment against ill-fortune, which had been somehow held in solution by the awareness of sin, nor to relax vigilance over moral defects. In fact, these defects must in some way be made intolerable in proportion to the recovered freedom, until men hold requirements against their characters as absolutely as if their eternal life depended on it.

Now universal religion, since philosophy has been in the world, has gone far toward meeting all sides of the problem thus developed, by making men aware of the primary importance of the *inner conditions* both of happiness and of righteousness. Through knowledge and self-discipline men may reach a point at which the balance of power in all questions of value, whether of happiness or of moral good, lies within, in the control of self-consciousness. Those deeds of ours that issue into the world of affairs are bound to bear the stamp of our finitude, both in their efficiency and in their worth, but the reflecting will, the attitude, the intention, may yet be infinite and true, and this is decisive: through the knowledge and use of this truth we are set free, and without the need of removal from empirical business. The heirs of the Stoics in all ages have thus taught men both how to be happy, and how, as it were, to forgive their own sins. They have established themselves in a world which fails to value the life of the subject by gaining the power and the art of valuing themselves, supported by the doctrine that they are in reality

integral parts of the divine being. If the cult of this principle is unable to do all that is required of religion, it may be because the spirit requires beyond its self-valuation an actual objective valuation. And in truth, subjectivity is not secure unless a man knows not simply that his subject-life is valuable, but that it is valued; and this support of his effort cannot come from within.

Nor can the fortuitous and partial valuation which men receive from their more intimate fellows stand as an absolute and penetrating support. At no one moment, as a man looks abroad into his social world, can he say that he is or has been valued there for what he absolutely is—the successful man perhaps even less than the unsuccessful. For the most part, however, men learn to see in human appreciations the symbols and stirrings of an actual divine judgment; they find in the manifold evidences of human love fragments of a real historic restoration, which in itself is the forgiveness of sins. Further—enlightened by the simple faith or the true philosophy to which most active men now come, which assures them that personality is, or may become, the thing of absolute worth in the universe in spite of,—nay, by means of its imperfection; and that in their own practical acceptance of this conviction God does in truth make them parts of himself; these fragments, indeed, cease to be fragments, becoming significant of an ideal totality, and one seems to have in the common world of experience that present objective support which was required for his inmost freedom. So far, the difficulty inherent in the Stoic solution is met by modern idealism; and the fruits of this idealism are integral parts of univeral religion.

But neither in one case nor in the other is there satisfaction of the legitimate *Wille zur Macht*. The religion of inwardness frankly refuses to value power in nature or in society. Idealism leaves the key of value still in the objective idea with which one supplements and interprets the fragments of experience; hence its last word with regard to empirical evil can be no other than resignation.[3] But the forgiveness of sins can not remain, for the subject, in the world of his ideal objects, exposed—even though it has attained the stability of a persistent faith—to the fluctua-

[3]See Royce, The World and the Individual, ii, pp. 407ff.

tions of that very self which requires its support. If God actually accepts men as his sons, he must endow them with divine power. What is divine power? At last, *power over nature*. It is the shrinking from this conclusion, that has turned so much religion into a figure of speech. The evidence that forgiveness is actual will be the presence in the world of history of a power which can be recognized as prophetic power, because it is self-consciously and literally in control of historical forces by virtue of its relation to God. The evidence of religion, as always, is miracle, immediate mastery over the world of tangible objects. Everything depends on looking for the miracle in the right place. Religion will indeed show itself in power over the body as we have recently begun to see; but the most miraculous of all powers is the power over history, the power whose visible sign is a true prophecy. For the true prophecy is not a forecast of what some power other than my own will bring about, but it is the true declaration that a given deed of my own stands permanently in history with the significance that I myself attach to it. It is here for the first time that the necessity or even the possibility of a human officer in religion becomes conceivable. Men can be saved only by being made sons of God, that is to say, finite spirits with prophetic power. This power is not for any thing one chooses, but only for what the god in him shall choose. This endowment is to be an act of God, an act of forgiveness; a forgiveness which does not take place alone in God's thought, but is to make this material difference in the position of the individual in nature and history. But how is the individual to know that it has taken place? How, in fact, is he to know that there is any such possibility in the universe? It is experience rather than reflexion that must bring this conviction; and the dilemma is that the conviction must be there before it is possible to make that launch of presumption through which alone the experience can come. Were one able to recognize in the facts of his historical environment an actual manifestation of prophetic power, it would do something to justify his presumption, that is, to make it it psychologically possible; were the manifestation thus discovered a prophecy whose sole intent was to bring prophecy itself to self-consciousness among men, it would be much more of a justification. But were there no such visible evidence that the prophetic

power is real, were the man who becomes clearly aware that this is what religion must accomplish alone in this insight, and himself in need of the actual objective assurance of his identity with God, he could find that assurance in no other concrete act than his own. Such an act on his part would thus indeed be an act of infinite presumption ; for himself he would be assuming the office of God in human history and attaining, as it were, his own salvation in the success of his own prophetic act. But since his own insight in entirely general, his act could not be for himself alone. Whatever else the act contained it must at least contain this meaning : " I, knowing the situation of human nature with reference to the divine judgment, take it upon myself actually and consciously to value that human nature as God values it, and to stand to the human race forever for the assurance that they are thus actually valued, and justified in the presumption of prophecy." In other words he would find it necessary to make it his own prophetic work to become the visible organ of the divine forgiveness.

The tradition of the god who loved mankind to the extent of dipping into the course of human experience, accepting mutilation and the death of men is an old one in the story of human religion. The notion of the immortal who had passed safely through the realm of death, and so assured the people that death also may be brought under the power of the spirit, was alive in the religion of Osiris, of the Syrian Adonis, of Orpheus, Dionysus, and Demeter in Greece, of Mithra throughout the Roman world. The conception of a messenger of God who should come to vindicate the righteous by setting up the divine justice *in our own visible history* was a pillar of fire by night to many a loyal soul among the Hebrews. Thus faith and mythology together had plentifully outlined a function which was becoming to men's minds the chief of all religious functions. The universal occurrence of this official figure among the religions of the world makes it certain that the philosophy of religion owes the embodied idea a fundamental place in its interpretations.

But these figures were all mythical. One might take them seriously enough to believe in them if they were placed suffi-

ciently far away in the past or the future. But then as now distance turns truth into poetry, and poetry into truth. These ideas lived as myth because they were not taken literally; men cultivated the mysteries by instinct, as if they knew themselves groping, at least, in the right direction. But could any one have taken these things literally, if the question of truth or falsehood had been sharply pressed? To make the effort must have led to skepticism, or to much winnowing: the incongruous and marvelous would melt away;—an idealized function would remain, and remain as an ideal, not an actuality. As an ideal or symbol it might easily become a part of universal religion.

May it perhaps be true that Jesus attempted to take his religion seriously, and was thereby led to a remarkable transformation of the conception of the Messiah? And may it be that he reached the conviction (so often appearing in the course of idealistic philosophy) that he who truly conceives the nature of an office is he who must, and even does, fulfill it? The simplicity and solemnity of a character can appear in nothing so clearly as in the inviolable dignity with which it assumes great office, a dignity wherein the utmost humility unites with the utmost self-assertion. As Jesus seems to have conceived the nature of his office, there could have been but one incumbent in human history, for he had his eye upon the whole movement of history and proposed to accomplish a necessary deed there, once for all. The office included the endurance of that solitude which attaches to every historic experiment first defined, accepted, and carried through with scientific rigor: should it succeed, none who follow can be solitary; none can endure *that* strain again, though they may endure others severe enough. Thus all who make a first experiment remove one possibility from all who follow. It would set men free, and yet leave them bound to that officer for their freedom. The successful fulfillment of the office implies that men are henceforth to be born into a freedom which they have not themselves acquired: in this respect they are bond, that they are indebted to another for liberty.

The success of the experiment of Jesus, if we have rightly characterized it, could consist in nothing else than that he should be in fact recognized by men as the incumbent of the office first literally understood by him. In this sense the free recognitions

of men are making the truth or falsity of the Galilean prophet; without that recognition he is not independently and abstractly divine. But, on the other hand, if he is a true prophet, it is because he has introduced into human experience the possibility of a self-conscious certainty in our empirical efficiency, from which all contingency has vanished. Hence his own action moves in the region of necessary accomplishment; and our own freedom consists in the alternative of recognizing that accomplishment or not. Should we do so our subjective selves may gain that "ontological validity" which we spoke about at the beginning as the desire of all religion. But while our speculative instincts thus gain the solid warrant of prophetic certainty, it is not through their own self-valuation that they are supported. It is an essential part of our freedom that salvation should thus come to us from without; that we are delivered from the *prerequisite* of complete self-knowledge, gaining that self-conscious life by first losing it; for the circle of self-consciousness is complete only in infinity.

To summarize: If Christianity is the final religion, it must be by the union of a universal and necessary religious function with the particular career of a human person. If Jesus of Nazareth is this figure, decisive and final in the history of religion upon this planet, it is not as Jesus but as the Christ that he is final. It is not as a teacher of ethics or of theology; nor is it as a man who exemplified the life of the ideal human being. Nor is he such a final figure because he taught and illustrated the divine significance of human life, even of the unsuccessful human life. But he is the final figure because he set into existence what I may venture to call the dialectic religious act (in contrast to the dialectic religious idea). By his own assumption of a positive relation to God, he made the supreme sanction for human life and suffering active, not contemplative or passive; and experiential, not merely ideal. He is final, because in all these things he legitimately intended to be final; because he self-consciously assumed the office of God in human history, and thereby established the fact that through such assumption that entire certitude of action can come to men which alone can make their situation ultimately endurable. He is thus the first of the

prophets; the typical prophet, whose prophecy was none other than this, that through his deed the prophetic power may be the conscious possession of every human being however situated.

There is much in human life as it is which makes it hard to believe that these things are literally true; that there is anything that can make life worth living to some, or anything that can make others worth keeping alive. Appearances are all against the existence of subjective justice in the course of history. But this fact,—that appearances are against it, and that the postulate at the bottom of it cannot be proved, is a situation fit to be filled by a permanent religious institution. And for the permanently separate existence of the Christian church, I discover no other valid reason.

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